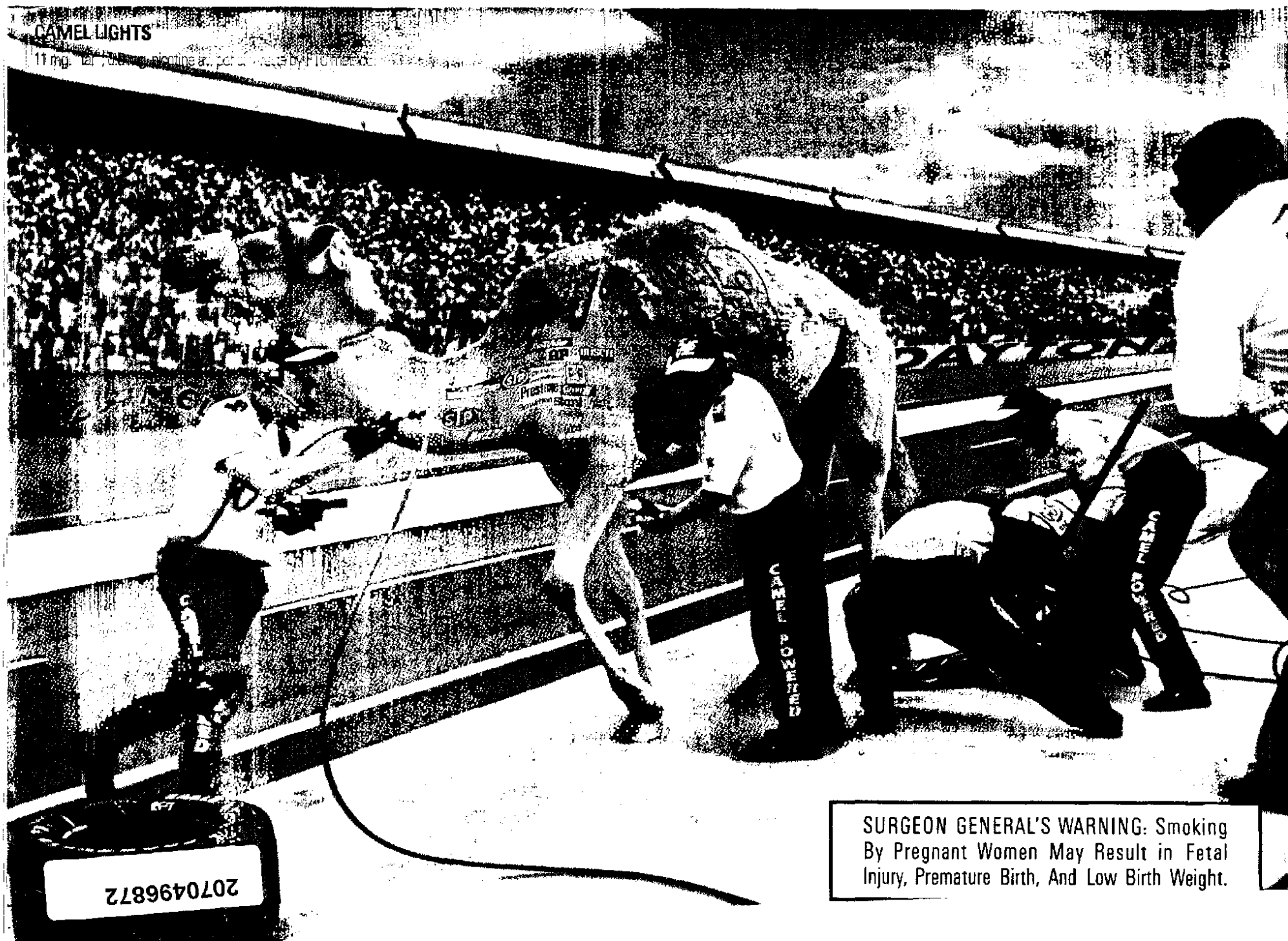


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## Chicago Bulls

it. He came back this fall with a point he wanted to make."

That point seems to be that Jordan can accomplish anything he chooses on a basketball court. With a 31.7-point average (in 38.3 minutes a game) through last weekend, he is back on top of the league scoring list—he won seven straight scoring titles before he retired—and the uncharacteristic trace of self-doubt that he admitted to last season has been nowhere in evidence. "Will I lead the league in scoring? I don't know," he says. "Can I lead the league in scoring? If I want to."

Jordan's performance this season indicates that, while he no longer seems compelled to prove on a nightly basis that he's the best player,

he's perfect. He low Norris in the se

most about the NBA was "how easy it has been and that no one had been able to stop him one-on-one. Jordan gave Stackhouse a 48-point lesson in humility in their first meeting.

Superlative as they have been, Jordan's and Pippen's performances were expected. It was Rodman, acquired from San Antonio in a trade in October, who had Jackson and general manager Jerry Krause crossing their fingers. So far Rodman has done exactly what they hoped: He has shored up the Bulls' rebounding (14.4 per game) while keeping his eccentricities

## Best of The Best?

that Michael Jordan he scored toward the basket. The massive presence of Chamberlain. In his prime, he was the only player who could put up a shot just as it's ultimately impossible to determine how the Bulls would have done against the only two teams that won a season faster: Philadelphia 76ers (19-1) and the 1971-72 Los Angeles Lakers (19-3), both of which had the legendary Chamberlain at center. The guess here is that the Bulls would put up a

fight but in the end would probably lose a close one. In a mythical Bull-Sixers matchup, Chamberlain would have a huge advantage at center, the Bulls' weakest position. That year he got only less the league in rebounding, with 24.1 points a game, and third in assists (7.8). However, Wilt made 24.1% of his free throws, which suggests that he would have been picked early and often by his Chicago counterparts, Jerry and Bill Warrington.

That Philadelphia team, which finished the season with a 68-13 record, had two other Hall of Famers, guard Hal Greiner and its sixth man, forward Billy Cunningham. They were joined by forwards Julius Jackson and Chet Walker and guard Billy Jones, gave the Sixers six players who had double-digit scoring averages. The Bulls have just three, Jordan, Pippen and Toni Kukoc. "That Philadelphia team had much better balance than the Bulls do," says Jack Ramsey, the 76ers' general manager that season. "All of those players were pretty much in their prime and had years that were better than among the best of their careers."

Jordan and Pippen would have had the edge in their



In mythical matchups, Chamberlain gives both Philadelphia and L.A. the center Chicago lacks.

they were a deeper, more balanced team than Chicago, with a bench that included guards Lynn Robinson and a long-haired fellow named Pat Riley.

As for the quality of competition in the league then it's logical to assume that the Bulls benefit from the expansion. But in the 10-team league that Philadelphia joined, only three clubs finished above .500—the Celtics and the San Francisco Warriors were the only ones. The Sixers had the advantage of beating the first-year out of nine times. This season Chicago will play the Toronto Raptors and Vancouver Grizzlies a total of

But perhaps it's unfair to compare this season's Bulls to history's great teams, not just because they haven't won a championship yet but also because they may not be the best team in franchise history. The 1991-92 Bulls, the second of Chicago's three straight championship teams and one that included solid center Bill Cartwright, estimable power forward Horace Grant and clutch shooter John Paxson, got off to a 37-5 start and finished 67-15. "If we can do the things that that team did, I don't really care about history," says Jordan. "I'll be satisfied."

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